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Talcum powder may cause cancer

DAN DOYLE TALCUM powder may cause ovarian cancer in women, doctors warn today. Dr David Oram, an ovarian cancer specialist, has advised women not to use talcum powder on the lower abdomen or around their genitals. His warning comes after research suggesting that talc can migrate to the ovaries. A link between talc and ovarian cancer was prompted a few years ago by the finding of talc granules in tumours. Dr Oram tells tonight's Face Value on BBC1: "We know that talcum powder is extremely abrasive and sets up a very severe reaction if it does get inside cavities. Talc granules can be found in up to 75 per cent of ovarian cancers." Talcum powder is made of magnesium silicate, a mineral substance that is difficult to break down in the body. The business is worth £28 million a year in the UK alone. "It has been demonstrated scientifically that granules can travel from the external genital areas through the vagina, up through the cervix and uterus, up the fallopian tubes and then on to the ovaries," he says. "Given the fact that ovarian cancer is such a lethal disease, the counsel of perfection would be to advise on a policy of safety and advise women not to use talc on the lower abdomen or external genital area." Durex, the condom maker, says talc should not be used in connection with its products. Surgical glove manufacturers have been moving towards powder-free gloves since the early 1980s. Steve King, the director of Regent Medical Surgical Gloves, tells the television programme: "There is a huge body of independent clinical evidence which has shown that talcum powder can cause a number of problems within the surgical environment." The potential dangers of talc are well known in the United States. Both the American Cancer Society and the American National Cancer Institute warn women that regular talc use has been shown to increase the risk of ovarian cancer. A Yale University study of 1,000 women found that those with ovarian cancer were 42 per cent more likely to have applied talc. A report in the American Journal of Epidemiology found that women who used talc in the genital area had an increase in ovarian cancer risk of 60 per cent. John Bailey, of the US food and drug administration, says women who want to err on the side of safety should check the labels on powders and feminine deodorant sprays to see if they contain talcum powder. But in the UK, the Department of Health says it is not aware of any proven causal link between the use of talc and ovarian cancer with adults or small babies.

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